The New Light

in

Ancient Places

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FEIRUZI.

The New Light in Ancient Places.

FIFTY minutes to the east of Hums, in the northern part of our Syria Mission, is a village of about eight hundred souls, called Feiruzi. To a passing traveler there is nothing to distinguish this village from others in this part of Syria. They all have the same mud-plastered, sun-dried brick walls ; the same public well, from which the water is drawn in a huge skin by a horse ; the same poverty of trees, grass and leafing shrubs ; the same blistering heat, flies, fleas, and other pests. But at Feiruzi we are on historic ground, the scene of great activity in the ancient world. Standing on a small artificial mound near the village, probably once used as a Roman guard station, we can see spread out before us on every side, one of the most interesting sections of country in the whole East.

For miles in every direction the country is as

level as a Western prairie. To the west the many minarets, indicating the presence of Moslem mosques, lift themselves above the city of Hums, the Roman *Emesa*, once the largest and most important in North Syria, a city then proud of being the birthplace of two Roman Emperors, the seat of learning, and made illustrious by the presence of the great temple of Baal with its hundreds of priests. Still westward can be seen the blue range of the Nusaireyeh Mountains, the home of that great sect, the descendants of a people mentioned in the early Scriptures. To the north one sees the cities of Hamath, Restan, ancient Arathusa ; still farther north, Antioch, the Rome of the East, capital of the royal Seleucidæ, and later the home of the first Christians. To the east lies the great Syrian desert, the camping ground of the roving children of Ishmael. Two days' journey over that lonely waste lies the mysterious city Palmyra, covering many a mile with the silent and splendid ruins of its former greatness. Far beyond, still across the monotonous and almost untrodden leagues, lie the ruins of Babylon. To the south can be seen the "entering in of Hamath," a narrow plain between the Lebanon and Anti-

Lebanon. Over this plain the mighty invading armies of ancient history crossed and recrossed on their way to conquest. To the extreme south we can discern Mt. Hermon, with its summit partly hidden by fleecy clouds. On the left of the plain, as we look southward, is situated Baalbec, whose ruins, for combined beauty and magnificence, are unequaled in the world. Only eight miles away is the village of Riblah, on the frontier of Israel (Num. 34:2). Jehoraz was imprisoned here by Pharaoh Necho (2 Kings 23:33). Later, Nebuchadnezzar brought King Zedekiah to this spot, "slew his sons before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him with fetters of brass, and carried him" with the children of Israel captive to Babylon (2 Kings 25:7). Still nearer, on the west of this plain, is the village where the great Rameses II., the Pharaoh of Israel's oppression, nearly came to grief at the hands of the Hittites. No doubt on the plain at our feet, or very near, encamped the troops of Zenobia of Palmyra, the Queen of the East; here she marshaled her hosts to meet the Emperor Aurelian and met overwhelming defeat, being carried away captive to walk in chains of gold at the triumph of her conqueror.



MUALLIM YUSEF

But it is not the history of the past which interests us most as we stand in Feiruzi; it is the living present, for into this dull village the light of Gospel truth has entered at last in these mission days.

About ten years ago the village priest, who seems to be a simple, godly man, became acquainted with one or two of the brethren of the church at Hums, and invited them to visit him at his house. As he had a genuine desire to learn of spiritual things, gradually the light entered his soul. His two sons, following their father's example, became regular attendants at the services of the Mission church at Hums. Soon after, the deacon of the village church and teacher of the village school, Muallim Yusef, became interested, and occasionally attended the services. About two years ago he became a regular attendant. At first these three men were the only ones interested, but soon the numbers increased, until at the present time there are often as many as twenty who attend the Sabbath services, walking the intervening miles.

Three years ago one of this number applied for church membership, and, after some time,

being found worthy, he was received. At first the persecution he met was so severe that he removed with his family to Hums, where he lived and worked at his loom. Six months after, he said to the brethren : "Am I always to live away from my home for fear of persecution ? I will return, and God will protect me." He did so, and all persecution ceased. One of the Hums young men gave a large Bible to the priest, and occasionally several of the brethren would visit Feiruzi and hold meetings in the priest's house. Two years ago a young woman attended our clinics at Hums ; she now tells us : "I came to get my physical sight restored, heard the Word read and preached, and God gave me spiritual sight. From that time I became a Protestant."

The eldest son of the priest moved to another village, saying : "I go as a Protestant, and will preach Christ as He gives me utterance." The most zealous of all these Feiruzi people was Muallim Yusef, the teacher of the village school. His zeal for Protestantism was reported from time to time to their Bishop, who soon came to see about it. He scolded the teacher for his visits to the Mission church, especially for his

teaching Protestantism to the children. The teacher replied : "If you will give me permission to form a society of young men here to meet together for mutual help I promise you I will cease going to Hums." It was granted ; but it was soon reported to the Bishop that it would never do to allow this society to continue, for it was a regular meeting for prayer and exhortation—"a Protestant meeting." So the society was disbanded by the Bishop's orders. Then the teacher began again his attendance upon divine service at Hums. Upon this there came a letter from the Bishop, who belonged to the Syriac church, a fragment of the old Jacobite sect, peremptorily commanding him to cease going, on pain of excommunication. The teacher took no notice of this, and the following document was sent by the Bishop and read in the Feiruzi church :

"*To Our Honorable Friends, Chiefs, Sheikhs, and Respected Men of Our Village of Feiruzi:*

"It is well known to you the actions and thoughts of Muallim Yusef, deacon and teacher of your village ; also, you are well acquainted with his belief in the Protestant sect and respect



AN OPEN-AIR HOSPITAL.

for it, and the many times you have witnessed and heard him testify for the Protestant faith. You have seen him repeatedly try to convert the minds of his neighbors, and notwithstanding this, you are still clinging to him, with his evil thoughts and beliefs. Now, it was told and confirmed to us that on Palm Sunday he went from your village to Hums, and worshiped with the Protestants there ; he listened to the words of blasphemy ; he joined with the blasphemers who cursed the sacraments of our church and those of the holy ones. And it has been proved conclusively to our mind by the evidence of many of our people that the mind of this teacher, Yusef, has seen a great change, and he has become as one diseased, and utterly evil. His salt is thoroughly and utterly bad. Therefore, we feel obliged to write you in reference to this evil-minded teacher, and tell you that you have no longer permission from God to allow him to officiate as deacon in your church, or teach your children. The reason is stated above—that is, his mind has been deceived, his faith become evil, and he has joined himself with liars and scorners. You know the prophet David said : 'In the place of the scorner and liar the righteous

do not sit.' He also says: 'God loveth not the deceitful lips;' and also because he is a deceiver and confesseth to lies and blasphemy, just like Balaam, the false prophet, that was deceived by wages of sin. Now we command you to send the above-mentioned fellow away from your church and school, and God will reward you for thus being rid of this blasphemer, liar and evil-minded man. These words strike as an arrow to my heart, but he must be refused entrance into the holy church, and, I repeat, he is a liar and a blasphemer. He who gives him assistance, and listens to his words, will be excommunicated and cursed. This is all that is necessary at this time, and may you live long.

"The called for you by God,

"ABD EL-MASIH

"(Servant of Christ), Bishop of the Syrian sect in Syria.

"April 14th, 1892."

Muallim Yusef was accordingly removed from his office as deacon and teacher, and at first no one would speak to him but the priest, who was as cordial as usual. This cordiality of the priest caused some gradually to change their bitter feelings toward him. Yusef consulted with some

of the brethren of the Hums church, and they loaned him money to begin work at his loom. From this he can earn eighty cents a week, and some of the parents of his former pupils have offered him the same amount to instruct their children in a quiet way. He says he is now independent, and can talk and preach Christ as much as he wishes. On the last night of our visit here in June last, he, with the priest's son, the church member, and one other convert, met me and my assistant and we held a little meeting for prayer. We sat on the ground, with our backs against one of the mud-walls outside the village. The brilliant, starlit Oriental sky above us, the baying of the many dogs of a Bedouin encampment near, all our strange surroundings, and the knowledge of God's blessing in permitting His light to shine in the hearts of some of these people, made it an occasion long to be remembered. A chapter from the Bible was read, prayers offered, a hymn was sung, then another, and a third. The priest's son said: "I feel so happy, I could sing all night." In reply to my question as to how many in the village were interested in the Gospel, one replied: "Like Nicodemus, who went to Jesus by night, there



FEIRUZI PEOPLE.

are about twenty; like Nicodemus afterward, when not afraid to let the whole world know of his interest in Christ, there are six." Mr. March and Mr. Nelson afterward, on a tour in the north, wrote that they had been to Feiruzi, and were very cordially received by the people. They made many visits, reading a chapter and offering prayer in each house. As the people are a simple-minded, religious folk, we trust and believe this village will become a second Minyara.

It is in these quiet ways that the Gospel light spreads from place to place in Syria. We have not seen the multitudes of converts who have made glad the hearts of our fellow missionaries in some other fields, but we do see the deep darkness of Syria's long night beginning to break. From village to village patient teachers have spread the truth, and faithful disciples, often in the face of losses and persecution, are confessing Christ, and in turn becoming themselves winners of souls.

Copies of this story can be obtained for three cents each, from William Dulles, Jr., Treas., 53 Fifth Avenue, New York City.

Will you not pray?

Among the Jews there has been a saying: "He prays not at all in whose prayers there is no mention of the Kingdom of God." "Let it be known, too," wrote Dr. Goodell, "that more apparently can be done now by prayer than in any other way. Whoever prays most, helps most." And John Foster declared: "When I shall see Christians all over the world resolved to prove what shall be the efficiency of prayer for the conversion of the world, I shall begin to think that the Millennium is at the door."

Will you go?

"In the whole compass of human benevolence there is nothing so grand, so noble, so heroic, so truly Godlike, as the work of evangelizing the heathen."—*William Swan.*

"That land is henceforth my country which most needs the Gospel of my Lord Jesus Christ."—*Zinzendorf.*

Shall we not act now?

"It is my deep conviction, and I say it again and again, that if the Church of Christ were what she ought to be, twenty years would not pass away before the Story of the Cross would be uttered in the ears of every living creature."—*Dying words of Simeon Calhoun.*